

## **Fruit and Vegetable Industry Priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill**

Fruit, vegetable and tree nut production in the United States accounts for \$35 billion in farmgate value, or 33% of farm cash receipts. With the addition of nursery and greenhouse production, overall specialty crops account for 51% of farmgate value.

The fruit and vegetable industry is organizing itself to advocate for a single common set of priorities in the 2007 Farm Bill. A broad array of fruit and vegetable trade associations representing U.S. growers and shippers have been working to forge mutual objectives for the Farm Bill, to assure a common platform across regions, commodities and other interests. We intend to work closely and collaboratively with allies in all specialty crops who share many of our priorities, as well as other stakeholders across U.S. agriculture.

### **Statement of Principles**

1. The fruit, vegetable, and tree nut industry is a critical and growing component of U.S. agriculture, deserving of full and equal consideration as other agricultural sectors in the Farm Bill. That demands a significant financial investment in mandatory spending.
2. The fruit, vegetable, and tree nut industry would not be well served by direct program payments to growers. Rather, our emphasis must be on building the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of U.S. fruit and vegetable production.
3. Government investment in the competitiveness and sustainability of the U.S. fruit and vegetable industry will produce a strong return on investment for *all of America*, not just farmers. By expanding access and availability of safe, wholesome, healthy and affordable fruits and vegetables, the Farm Bill will be a critical component in reaching the mandate of doubling fruit and vegetable consumption called for in the USDA/HHS 2005 Dietary Guidelines. That makes the 2007 Farm Bill more relevant to every Congressional district in the country than ever before.
4. Government investment in this agriculture industry is required to create a fair, level playing field with international competitors who do not face the regulatory burdens of U.S. producers. With the government's mandate that domestic producers must meet the very highest standards in environmental regulation, labor and other areas comes the responsibility to help those producers achieve cost-effective compliance. Without appropriate assistance U.S. production will re-locate to less restrictive foreign growing areas.
5. Consumers in U.S. export markets are increasingly demanding high value food products as their disposable income rises. A thriving and competitive U.S. fruit, vegetable, and tree nut industry will support strong growth in export markets and improve our agricultural balance of trade. In order to realize the goal of increasing exports, it is critical that federal policy and resources support efforts to remove the many existing international trade barriers that continue to block U.S. fruit, vegetable, and tree nut exports.

### **Specific Farm Bill Priorities**

1. **Restrictions on Planting Flexibility** – We support this long-standing provision as a fundamental matter of equity among farmers. As long as some farmers receive direct payments from the government, they should not be allowed to plant crops on that subsidized land that compete with unsubsidized farmers.
2. **Nutrition Programs** – We support a strong new focus within the 2007 Farm Bill on increasing the access and availability of fruits and vegetables, particularly to children. We support expansion of the school fruit and vegetable snack program, increased commodity purchases, higher allocation to the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh program for schools, development of a new nutrition promotion program to assist producers in enhancing their markets, and a general requirement that USDA feeding programs and commodity purchasing comply with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines.
3. **State Block Grants** – We support an expansion of the State Block Grants for Specialty Crops program originally authorized in the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004, and funded through appropriations in the FY06 Agricultural Appropriations bill. Due to the wide diversity and localized needs in specialty crop production, state departments of agriculture are uniquely able to assist local growers with the specific investments they need to increase competitiveness.
4. **International Trade --** We support programs to increase foreign market access, to increase funding for the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops program, and creating a new Export Division within APHIS to attack with much greater vigor the real but too often hidden trade barriers facing our industry in SPS issues. We will also work with allies to seek continued support for the Market Access Program
5. **Invasive Pests and Disease** – We support significant new investment in prevention of the unintentional introduction of plant pests and diseases. Investment in prevention is more cost-effective than mitigation.
6. **Research** – We support significant new investment in research for specialty crops, through both the National Research Initiative and programs within CSREES and ARS.
7. **Conservation Programs** – We support a mandatory allotment of funding for specialty crop production within EQIP similar to what currently exist for the livestock industry. We will work with all allies to expand general support for conservation programs.
8. **Unique Attributes of Specialty Crop Producers** – Due to the nature of high-value specialty crop production, many current Farm Bill programs and disaster programs are of limited benefit to specialty producers due to payment caps, limits on Adjusted Gross Income, limits on off-farm income even if integral to farming operations, etc. We support a thorough review of all farm programs to ensure that specialty crop producers have access to benefits comparable to other farmers, rather than being excluded or limited simply due to a higher-cost of production.